Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method for distributing variations of electronic data through multiple merchants to purchasers, comprising the steps of:

publishing a core portion for a first merchant to make available to purchasers as a first variation having a first merchant-specific portion;

publishing a second variation containing the core portion for a second merchant to make available to purchasers as a second variation having a second merchant-specific portion, and

wherein the first merchant-specific portion differing from the second merchant-specific portion so that a purchaser's viewing or execution of the first variation evokes an association with the first merchant and a purchaser's viewing or execution of the second variation evokes an association with the second merchant.

2. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 1, wherein

the first merchant adds the first-merchant specific portion to the core portion to produce the first variation,

and the second merchant adds the second-merchant specific portion to the core portion to produce the second variation.

3. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 1, wherein

a publisher provides the core portion to the first merchant with both the first-merchant specific portion and the second-merchant specific portion, and

the first merchant enables or deletes at least a part of the second-merchant specific portion to produce the first variation.

4. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 1, wherein the core portion includes a program executable by a computer device.

5. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 4, wherein the core portion is a rendering application for rendering content, such that the rendering of content using the first variation evokes an association with the first merchant.

6. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 4, wherein the core portion is a commerce application for purchasing goods or services, such that the purchase of goods or services using the first variation evokes an association with the first merchant.

7. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 6, wherein the core portion is a commerce application for purchasing goods or services from the first merchant.

8. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 6, wherein the core portion is a commerce application for purchasing content.

9. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 4, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by controlling an appearance of the program during execution.

10. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 9, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by providing a user interface for the program during execution that displays at least one image associated with the first merchant.

11. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 4, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by controlling one or more functions of the program during execution.

12. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 11, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by providing added functionality to the program during execution, such that the added functionality relates to the first merchant.

13. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 12, wherein the program is a browser application for retrieving content from sites in network.

14. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 13, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by providing function controls in a user interface for the browser that facilitate the retrieval of content from only sites associated with the first merchant.

15. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 13, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by providing function controls in a user interface for the browser that facilitate the retrieval of specific content associated with the first merchant.

16. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 4, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by controlling an operation of the program during execution.

17. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 16, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by limiting or expanding the operation of the program during execution.

18. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 17, wherein the program is a browser application for retrieving content from sites in network.

19. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 18, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by limiting the operation of the browser to the retrieval of content from only sites associated with the first merchant.

20. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 18, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by limiting the operation of the browser to the retrieval of specific content associated with the first merchant.

21. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 18, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by limiting operation of the browser application so that the browser application may retrieve content from designated sites only when the browser application is executing at a physical location defined by the first merchant.

22. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 16, wherein the first-merchant specific portion evokes an association with the first merchant by facilitating cooperation between the program and another executable program associated with the first merchant.

23. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 1, wherein the core portion is content such that rendering of the first variation evokes an association with the first merchant and rendering of the second variation evokes an association with the second merchant.

24. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 1, wherein the first-merchant specific portion is integrated with the core portion such that the first-merchant specific portion cannot be replaced by a portion specific to another merchant without damaging the first variation.

25. The method of distributing variations of electronic data recited in claim 1, wherein the first-merchant specific portion is integrated with the core portion such that the first-merchant specific portion cannot be deleted from the first variation without damaging the first variation.

26. An computer readable medium having stored thereon a data structure, comprising:

a first data field containing core data such that, when executed by a computer, the computer performing one or more functions; and

a second data field containing branding data for modifying the performance of the functions such that the performance of the functions evokes an association with a merchant.

27. The computer readable medium of claim 26, wherein the second data field contains one or more types of data selected from the group consisting of:

appearance branding data for modifying an appearance of the performance of the functions;

operational branding data for modifying the operation of the functions; and

functionality branding data for modifying the performance of the functions.

28. The computer readable medium of claim 26, wherein the second data field contains branding information for a plurality of merchants, such that all of the branding information except for branding information relating to a single merchant must be deleted or deactivated before a computer may properly perform the one or more functions.

29. The computer readable medium of claim 28, wherein the second data field contains one or more types of data selected from the group consisting of:

appearance branding data for modifying an appearance of the performance of the functions;

operational branding data for modifying the operation of the functions; and

functionality branding data for modifying the performance of the functions.

30. A method of selling branded software comprising the steps of:

receiving a software application;

branding said software application;

forwarding said branded software application to a user.

31. The method according to claim 30, wherein said forwarding step includes transmitting said branded software application to said user over the Internet.

32. The method according to claim 30, wherein said forwarding step includes selling said branded software in a store.

33. A method of selling branded software comprising the steps of:

receiving a software application with multiple brandings;

preventing access to at least one of the multiple brandings associated with said software application;

forwarding said branded software application to a user.

34. The method according to claim 33, wherein said forwarding step includes transmitting said branded software application to said user over the Internet.

35. The method according to claim 33, wherein said forwarding step includes selling said branded software in a store.

36. A method of selling branded software comprising the steps of:

receiving a software application;

adding multiple brandings to said software application;

forwarding said branded software application to a user.

37. The method according to claim 36, wherein said forwarding step includes transmitting said branded software application to said user over the Internet.

38. The method according to claim 36, wherein said forwarding step includes selling said branded software in a store.

39. A method of branding software comprising the steps of:

receiving a software application;

adding at least one branding to said software application.

40. The method according to claim 39, wherein said adding step occurs at the software application provider.

41. The method according to claim 39, wherein said adding step occurs at a merchant.

42. The method according to claim 39, wherein said adding step occurs at the location of an end user.

43. A system for branding software comprising:

an input;

a processor; and

an output;

wherein branding information is received from said input and wherein said processor combines said branding information with a software application and forwards said branded application to said output.

44. The system according to claim 43, wherein said processor is associated with an application provider.

45. The system according to claim 43, wherein said processor is associated with a merchant.

46. The system according to claim 43, wherein said processor is associated with an end user.